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TAGS: PREL MARR CVIS SENV TN  
SUBJECT: TONGA DEPLOYMENTS TO IRAQ; RELATED ISSUES

REF: SUVA 020

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Another reminder: Iraq deployments linked to visa issue

¶1. (C) During a meeting with Ambassador Dinger in Nuku'alofa Feb. 6, Tonga Foreign/Defense Minister Tu'a re-confirmed that, per reftel, if Tonga decides to continue deploying forces to Iraq into 2009, past the end of the current UN resolution, Tonga expects any such deployments to come under the umbrella of a U.S.-Iraq Defense Cooperation Agreement. Tu'a recalled with pride the obviously high regard which U.S. military leaders have in the contributions of TDS troops serving at Camp Victory. Tu'a noted, though, that the Tonga Government continues to link future Iraq deployments to a satisfactory outcome from the request for delivery of some sort of USG non-immigrant visa services on the ground in Tonga.

Request for wharf project aid; environmental query

¶2. (C) In conversations with senior Tonga officials, the Ambassador noted PM Sevele's request in Honolulu, per reftel, for U.S. military engineers to help Tonga's Public Works Ministry complete reconstruction and expansion of the main wharf in Nuku'alofa as a visible symbol to the people of Tonga that Iraq deployments gain concrete benefits. One well-placed official was clearly taken aback at the news. He noted that the wharf construction project has controversial aspects, including that Public Works commenced it without a required environmental-impact study. Another senior official later said the same and claimed that wharf re-construction already seems to be affecting marine life along the shoreline. If the U.S. military were to assist with the wharf project, would an environmental-impact assessment need to be in place?

Helping deportees; a possible mil-aid angle?

¶3. (U) During the trip, tied to a successful port visit by the USS Reuben James, the Ambassador also followed up on past efforts to stimulate Tongans to provide a safety net of sorts for deportees. The U.S. deports around 25 Tongans per year because of criminal activity or immigration violations. Until recently, those deportees, many of whom emigrated to the U.S. in early childhood and have no recollection of Tonga, received no assistance to adapt back "home." As a result, some are reportedly engaging in crime, including violent crime. The deportees arrive from Australia and New Zealand, as well as the U.S., but U.S. deportees seem most visible. The Ambassador has urged churches (Free Wesleyan and Mormon), civil society, and elements of the Tonga Government

to assist. Tonga Immigration and the Free Wesleyan Church have now taken the lead, with other churches and NGOs on board, to provide a "LifeLine Tonga" orientation program that, it is hoped, will help provide the needed safety net.

¶4. (U) LifeLine reported that the Free Wesleyan Church has donated land for a building in Nuku'alofa to house deportee-oriented activities permanently. The LifeLine organizers asked if the USG might help construct the building. Embassy Suva would gladly work with PACOM or others to evaluate that potentially useful humanitarian-assistance construction project.

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